

Instructional leadership levels of school principals under the context of constructivist primary curriculum - quantitative results

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine primary school principals' levels of instructional leadership behaviors from the perspectives of school teachers under the context of constructivism applied in primary schools in Turkey. A scale related to constructivist school curriculum is developed and school principals' instructional leadership behaviors and competencies are examined under three dimensions of the scale: "Constructing Systematic Instruction Environment", "Curriculum leadership and Guidance" and "Supporting Instruction and Shared Instructional Leadership". The universe of the study is determined to be 26 schools in the city borders of Şanlıurfa in the academic year 2011-2012 and the sample is composed of 382 primary school teachers, which were selected through stratified sampling. According to results of the study, school principals are seen to exhibit mostly behaviors "constructing systematic instruction environment" at good level; "curriculum leadership and guidance" at medium level and "supporting instruction and shared instructional leadership" at good level.

Keywords: Instructional Leadership, Constructivism, Primary Schools, Curriculum Leadership

Introduction

The extensive use of internet and communication technologies in all parts of life, globalization, information society, personal freedom democracy,

respect to human rights, equality etc. has increased the expectations related to education systems and changed them (Şimşek and Adıgüzel, 2010). In line with this, education and all stakeholders of schools are affected from these expectations in various ways. Bearing this fact in mind, Ministry of National Education (MEB, 2005) in Turkey started a nationwide change in 2005 to reach desired levels in education by employing constructivism to the full extent in primary schools. Especially with the implementation of constructivism based primary school curriculum in Turkey, it could be said there occurred a need for more comprehensive instructional applications and behaviors to help this curriculum to be applied effectively. Actually, it is not possible to manage constructivist curriculums under old management methods. Only a leadership that is structured around constructivism can help education communities to accelerate educational and social development. The curriculums based on constructivism based approach have not just changed the roles of students and teachers, but also the roles principals to great extent. Incorporating constructivism into school culture and new constructivist applications will differentiate the roles of school management and principal (Terzi, 2011). In this regard, school principal's instructional leadership sufficiency and behavior levels are examined in this study.

Constructivism: Constructivism which has been known for so long time has been described and named in different ways (Oxford, 1997; Warwick, 2001). It is an understanding which takes student into the center and active learning of students. Education is a work of forming active and

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constructivist processes (Dewey, 1916). According to Kant (1787), human logic can only understand the things it produces. Similarly, Vico emphasized that humans would know nothing apart from the cognitive structures that they build themselves and added that The Creator created the world in different ways; therefore, it is only him that knows the real world and everything, so people know only the thing that they form or make (Glaserfeld, 1989). Though constructivism is a well-accepted model employed in learning process, its acceptance and success highly depends on the teachers and their acts in the classroom, as it is them that will employ constructivist methods while leading the students. Owen (2007) stated that if teachers are expected to give education in a constructivist way, they should be provided with related experience and be given time in school practice to model the theory.

Instructional Leadership: Instructional leadership came forward with the effective schools movement in 1970-80s. This concept has been highlighted many times for the fact that principals are held as responsible for student performance (Hallinger, 2005). The roles of school principals accepted as curriculum manager before have experienced a transition to instructional leadership with the new expectations of policy makers. It was foreseen that the effective applications in teaching and learning processes and the quality of the instruction could be maintained with the effective leadership of school principal. Technological and social developments today have increased the value of education and attracted attention to teacher, student, school and environment that make up the important parts of education. Under this context, there could be mentioned a need for a leader that can manage these four part well and lead to success. It is not enough today for a leader to own basic managerial qualities, but to manage all stakeholders in a qualified way. The instructional leadership aspect of principals is tried to be combined with their managerial roles (Zelik, 2007). Policy makers have begun to pay a lot attention to school leaders and put the leaders' decisions and behaviors on the agenda and thus seen them increasingly responsible in student success and school effectiveness (Pont, Nusche and David, 2008). The principal are supposed to realize some roles such as maintaining high expectations and success feeling in students, supervising the classroom, coordinating the school curriculum and controlling the student achievement (Barth, 1986). The changes in

educational domain made it necessary for principals to realize instructional leadership roles (Graczewski, Knudson and Holtzman, 2009). In line with this fact, instructional leadership is also called "student centered leadership" due to its focus on student achievement and school climate. (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott and Cravens, 2009). In studies conducted, it was found out that the more leaders focus their work on learning and teaching, the more they affect the student achievement (Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe, 2008). The increase of the proofs about the direct relationship between high student achievement and instructional leadership has not escaped the attention of some education policy makers and thus principals of instructional leadership are taken into account in forming education policy (Robinson, 2010).

New Paradigms in Instructional Leadership: When the current literature about instructional leadership is examined, organizational management and distributed leadership are seen to enter into the scope of instructional leadership.

Organizational Management: A different point of view about instructional leadership is to focus on staff and management of the organization rather than daily teaching and learning activities. Organizational management means equipping the school with high quality staff and providing every support and source in meeting the desired success in classroom setting by establishing a good management structure (Horng and Loeb, 2010). Principal as instructional leader has a meditative effect on student achievement by guiding and distributing tasks to the teachers in school and preparing developmental opportunities.

Shared Instructional Leadership: The roles of leaders could be distributed to teachers, which will benefit the school and help the participation of stakeholders. Incorporating the teachers into development of school education and instruction process and benefiting from their expertise is a logical and good way to help the schools reach their goals, which can increase the functionality of the teachers as prospective leaders. The distribution of instructional leadership roles among the teachers will both help principals to decrease the amount of their workload and establish long term instruction success in the classes (Graczewski, Knudson and Holtzman, 2009). Being leaders, teachers would assume the responsibility for their vocational and instructional developments and principals

would be supporters of teacher development rather than be inspectors of teachers' mistakes (Poole, 1995). Taking all the implications into account, it could be said "principal is not the sole leader of an organization, but a leader that assumes the leadership of all other leaders" (Glickman, 1989). So, principal's roles have moved to new levels and have been shared. They are given roles beyond the classic management roles that lead the school leaders that share the some responsibility of school principal.

Statement of the Problem: The purpose of this study is to determine primary school principals' levels of instructional leadership roles from the perspectives of primary school teachers under the context of constructivist primary school curriculum applied in Turkey. Three dimensions are determined under this context and tried to be answered.

1) What are the instructional leadership levels of primary school principals under the context of constructivist curriculum applied in primary schools according to dimensions of;

a) Constructing Systematic Instruction Environment,

b) Curriculum leadership and Guidance,

c) Supporting Instruction and Shared Instructional Leadership.

Methodology

The universe of the study is determined to be 10 centre, 10 town and 6 village schools in the city borders of Şanlıurfa in the academic year 2011-2012. The sample is composed of 382 primary school teachers out of 882 teachers that constitute the entire universe in these schools. The sample is based on stratified sampling and % 50 of the universe is set as target number to be included in the study. The study which is based on descriptive model is analyzed through SPSS 20.0 and is subject to frequency, percentage and standard deviation for data analysis.

Results and Discussion

The statement of the problem is aimed to be answered and the results are to be shown in this part of the paper. The data collected through survey distributed to all universe are analyzed under three dimensions and the results of dimensions are shown in Table 1, 2 and 3. The results pertaining to "constructing systematic instruction environment" levels of school principals according to opinions of teachers are shown in Table 1

Table 1. The Level of Principal's Behaviors for Constructing Systematic Instruction Environment

| Scale Dimension | N | \bar{X} | Ss |
|---|-----|-----------|------|
| Constructing Systematic Instruction Environment | 382 | 3.55 | 1.00 |

When the table 1 is examined in view of teacher opinions, principals are seen to exhibit the behaviors of constructing systematic instruction environment frequently ($\bar{X} = 3.55$). So, it could be said that school principals have a good level of constructing systematic instruction atmosphere and provide the related settings and requirements for school success. This result is supported by several studies. İlçtaç (2010) stated in his study that instructional leadership roles related to systematic teaching-learning environment and atmosphere behaviours were seen to be realized by principals between the levels of % 50 and % 69. Tatlılioğlu and Okyay (2012), Serin and Buluz (2012) told that the behaviors which fall into "establishing systematic teaching-learning environment and atmosphere" sub-dimension were realized "frequently" by the principals. Gürbüz and Hacıfazaoğlu (2012) marked in their study that the behaviours which fall into the same sub-dimension were seen to be realized again sufficiently by the principals.

Principal is the one that directs all events and determines the school atmosphere. Therefore, some tasks fall into responsibility area of principal so that systematic instruction environment is provided at sufficient levels. According to Argon and Mercan (2009), principal should know the sub-cultures and maintain systematic teaching-learning environment and atmosphere, principals are also supposed to realize basics such as bearing the function of the school in mind, visiting the teachers in classrooms, guiding and supporting, following student success and improving it, forming a vision, supervising the teaching and learning process. Şişman (2004) stated that school climate has a multiple effect on people's moral, performance, motivation and their integration with school.

The results pertaining to "curriculum leadership and guidance of teachers by the principals" according to opinions of teachers are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The Level of Principal's Behaviours for Curriculum Leadership and Guidance

| Scale Dimen- sion | N | \bar{X} | Ss |
|------------------------------------|-----|-----------|------|
| Curriculum Leadership and Guidance | 382 | 3.23 | 1.00 |

As is shown in the Table 2, the realization level of behaviors related to “curriculum leadership and guidance” according to teacher opinions is found to be at medium level ($\bar{X}=3.23$). Actually the problem of low guidance levels by principals in helping teachers could be said to be a big problem that is faced in application of new school curriculums. In line with this, Aydoğan (2008) found out in his study that principals are not well equipped for or sufficient in guidance.

According to Öztaş (2010) principals should know the education philosophy; understand the changes in the related area and the nature of the social transformation; have updated information about the curriculum development. As a matter of fact, the knowledge about the content of teaching curriculum, curriculum evaluation and development is a must for today's principals (Şişman, 2004). Principals should see themselves as instructional leaders and guide teaching-learning events in schools (Özdemir and Sezgin, 2002)

Successful school principals prove themselves to be effective guides for teachers by showing them effective instruction ways in supervision process and encouraging them to develop their teaching methods and increasing students' success together with providing a real guidance in their developmental areas and developing teachers' instructional skills (Derbedek, 2008). Arslan and Demirel (2007) expressed in their study that principals can't inform parents about primary school curriculum as they do not have sufficient knowledge about constructivism based primary school curriculum; therefore, they can't internalize the curriculum sufficiently and they go on preferring the traditional methods in teaching.

The results of “supporting instruction and shared instructional leadership” dimension according to opinions of teachers are shown below in Table 3.

When the results are examined under the con-

text of teacher opinions in table 3, principals are seen to exhibit the behaviors of Supporting Instruction and Shared Instructional Leadership frequently or sufficiently ($\bar{X} = 3.42$). Also, according to the results of the study of Korkmaz and Gündüz (2012) on shared leadership, most of the teachers working primary schools think principals to realize shared leadership behaviors at high levels. It is especially important for teachers to get support from the principal for their motivation and the features of the physical area in which they work also play important role in motivation as comfort of the workplace and feeling of getting support will benefit the teachers positively (Gürocak and Hacifazoglu, 2012).

Table 3. The Level of Principal Behaviour for “Supporting Instruction and Shared Instructional Leadership”.

| Scale Dimen- sion | N | \bar{X} | Ss |
|--|-----|-----------|------|
| Supporting Instruction and Shared Instructional Leadership | 382 | 3.42 | 1.09 |

Instructional leadership is a domain that necessitates direct interest in students, teachers, teaching curriculum and teaching-learning processes (Aksoy and Işık, 2008). In this regard, it could be said that principal's support and respect towards all school stakeholders and incorporation of them into school management and focus on “us” mentality will contribute into comprehensive development of school. No structure or institution can be changed without the support of internal and external stakeholders (Özdemir, 1998).

Conclusions

With the student centered developments in education, constructivist curriculum has gained a strong place. This approach has changed the teaching methods and the roles of teachers and students, together with the principals. Upon the implementation of constructivist primary school curriculum in Turkey, there have been efforts that have aimed at improving the quality of instructional leaders. For

a guilty leader, there are some characteristics to be owned. They should be aware of their constructive education philosophy, know the related changes in the curriculum and be a good guide and example for learning. They are expected to construct a systematic learning environment for students, be a good curriculum leader and share their responsibilities among the personnel.

When the results are examined from these perspectives as in the study, principals are found to exhibit “constructing systematic instruction environment behaviors” at good level, “curriculum leadership and guidance behaviors” at moderate level and “supporting instruction and shared instructional leadership behaviors” at sufficient levels. According to item by item results of the study, school principals are seen to exhibit mostly behaviors of “doing the related distribution of work and responsibilities among the personnel of school” under the dimension of constructing systematic instruction environment and “encouraging teachers for active use of teacher guide books prepared for new curriculum” under the dimension of curriculum leadership and guidance and “respecting school stakeholders’ values” under the dimension of supporting instruction and shared instructional leadership.

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